NORTH DAKOTA STUDENT ASSOCIATION | THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS

HB 1451

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Connor Ferguson, North Dakota Student Association

(612) 454-8288 | connor.ferguson@und.edu

Chair Heinert and Members of the Committee: My name is Connor Ferguson, and I am the Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Research for the North Dakota Student Association (NDSA). I am testifying today on behalf of the NDSA in support of HB 1451.

The North Dakota Student Association is a student organization established in 1969 dedicated to ensuring that students have a voice at the table in policy that affects Higher Education. We consist of delegates from each of the 11 public institutions meeting monthly to engage students in ND Higher Education policy. Our mission is to empower students, create collaboration between the student bodies of the North Dakota public universities, and to give a student perspective on higher education policy.

On November 5th, 2022 the NDSA passed the resolution NDSA-09-2223: A Resolution in Support of the NDSA's Legislative Priorities for the 23-25 Biennium. One of the priorities enumerated by the resolution is the increase of access to financial aid for NDUS students. The North Dakota Student Association also passed NDSA-08-2223: A Resolution in Support of NDUS Scholarships, which emphasizes the importance of scholarships for NDUS students. We believe that scholarships are essential for many students to access a quality education concern of severe financial burden. Finally, the NDSA passed NDSA-12-2223: A Resolution in Support of HB 1003: Higher Education Budget Allocation for the 23-25 Biennium on Saturday, January 21st, 2023. In this resolution, the NDSA discussed the importance of affordable education for retention of skilled workers and the economic development of emerging technologies.

The passage of HB 1451 will significantly increase the financial well-being of NDUS students from the state of North Dakota. If passed, this bill will continue to promote ND institutions of higher education as a competitive, appealing option for those considering moving out of state for college by lowering the cost of enrollment for high achieving students. These students will likely work in flourishing and productive industries which have high demand for intelligent, new workers. It is important that the state of North Dakota leverages this population and keeps students in the state for sustainable economic development. The scholarship funded by HB 1451 is an investment in the next generation of North Dakotans that will pay off for years to come.

The NDSA also believes that affordable access to education is essential. Affordable education will continuously fuel and develop North Dakota's economy by offering more opportunities for success to those concerned by the severe economic burden. As students, we value access to quality education and we believe that providing scholarship opportunities to students from North Dakota will be essential for bringing students into high demand jobs and retaining a youthful workforce in the state. On behalf of the North Dakota Student Association and students across the NDUS, I urge the committee to provide a Do Pass recommendation on HB 1451.